

Black Mage of Kuoh

by Quatermass

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Summary: Vivi Ornitier died after a short but fruitful life. Given the chance to live again, he reincarnates on Earth as Issei Hyoudou. Aware of the Three Factions and his Sacred Gear by the time he attends Kuoh, Issei will need to deal with enemies old and new, while coping with becoming one of Rias Gremory's Peerage...

1. Foreword

FOREWORD

With the impending release of *Final Fantasy IX* on Steam, I wanted to do an update themed around my *Final Fantasy IX* stories, albeit not exclusive to them. While I hadn't intended to post a new story, inspiration strikes in the oddest ways, and this was an idea that needed to be told, as a celebration of the release of my personal favourite *Final Fantasy* game on Steam.

After the surprise success of *Fall to Zenith*, my crossover between Harry Potter and *Highschool DxD*, I wanted to do another fic of that crossover, but my next attempt, *Sympathy for the Devil*, turned out crap, and I decided to abandon it. I was wavering about whether I should do a pure Highschool DxD fanfic, or another crossover with Harry Potter. If the former, I wanted a quiet, solemn, and serious Issei, partly inspired by the one in YagamiNguyen's Soundless Knight. But as I thought about it idly once, I realised, quiet, solemn, and serious fits one of the characters from Final Fantasy IX: Vivi.

Vivi kind of gets a raw deal in the game. He's only about six months or so old (despite acting like a much older child), and ends up dying after the game's events. Okay, yes, I spoiled that little part of the game, but it's over a decade old, the statute of limitations has run out on spoilers. Anyway, I had this weird notion of doing a type of fic that I had tried to do, but never really done before: a

reincarnation fic. Considering one of my favourite _Highschool DxD_ fics is a reincarnation fic (_Reborn as Issei_ by lfonzo, which has Issei being the reincarnation of Jiraiya from _Naruto_), it has some small merit.

Anyway, time for the usual disclaimers. Firstly, there will be spoilers for both _Highschool DxD_, and _Final Fantasy IX_, especially the latter.

Secondly, there will be annotations, heavy annotations, and bellyachers will be treated with all due contempt.

Thirdly, for language, violence, and sexual references (the latter is a given, as this IS _Highschool DxD_ after all), this is an M-rated work.

Finally, the following is a fan-written work. _Final Fantasy IX_ and _Highschool DxD_ are the properties of their respective owners. Please support the official release. Otherwise, Koneko will come around to your place and beat you upâ€!

2. Chapter 1: Vivi's New Life

CHAPTER 1:

VIVI'S NEW LIFE

Some people live more in twenty years than others do in eighty. It's not the time that matters, it's the person.

The Doctor, from Doctor Who: The Lazarus Experiment, _by Stephen Greenhorn_

_Vivi Ornitier was dead. He had known the end was coming for some time. He had known since he had spoken to Number 288, the then-leader of the Black Mage Village. And that knowledge had prepared him for the inevitable. _

Not that he was truly resigned to death by any means. Rather, that he knew it would happen, and soon. It was one of the reasons why he had worked with Mikoto, the Genome who was effectively Zidane's sister, to create what she called 'enhanced clones', but what he called his children. The few remaining Black Mages would be able to have children who could live longer, and indeed, grow into adulthood, hopefully without perishing.

In his dying moments, Vivi got one last surprise. Zidane, who had been missing since Kuja's defeat, had come to his deathbed. He was there when Vivi passed on. Vivi had looked up to the young Genome as a big brother, and given that Zidane had been made by Garland to be an 'Angel of Death', it was perversely fitting that he be there when Vivi died.

Deathâ€|it was like being swept along in a flood of memories. Having learned of the Crystal, and where life and memory returned to, he knew this was where he was going.

He wasn't expecting what came next.

* * *

><p>When consciousness returned to him, he found himself in a small, cosy room that reminded him of the dining room of Eiko's house in Madain Sari. A large table, with a pair of chairs on it. Seated at one of them wasâ€|Princess Garnet? Well, Queen _Garnet now._

Vivi blinked in bemusement. "Dagger? Princess?"

Garnet looked at him kindly, before shaking her head. "I just assumed her appearance." She gestured to the chair. "Please, sit down." As he did so, she said, "I took on Garnet's appearance because I thought it would be reassuring. Out of all the people you know, she was perhaps the most calming. You'll need that, given what I'm about to say." After a moment, she said, "I am Death."

Once more, Vivi blinked in bemusement. "Death?"

_ "Yes. Before you ask, Necron, the entity you fought after Kuja, wasn't actually the embodiment of death. He's the embodiment of oblivion and nothingness. Death does not necessarily mean oblivion here," Death said in a soothing tone. "Death is but a part of life, something the Terrans failed to realise properly. The downfall of Terra was due to their making themselves immortal, and thus disrupting the original cycle of souls of their Crystal. What dies is reborn anew eventually. Garland, and those who created him, have much to answer for. With Terra gone, and the Iifa Tree no longer disrupting the Gaian cycle of souls, Gaia can return to normal. However, there are still irregularities. The Gaian Crystal was damaged thanks to the meddling of the Terrans and Kuja's hissy fit. It is healing, but some souls have already escaped the Crystal, and between the cracks of reality, cracks left behind when Kuja destroyed Terra."_

_ "Ummâ€|Miss Deathâ€|why are you telling me this?" Vivi asked._

Death smiled gently. "What a polite boy you are. Most people just rage at me, or else try to bargain for more life. Actually, I am telling you because I got a soft spot for you and your fellow adventurers. Zidane, Garnet, Freya, Steiner, Eiko, Quina and Amarantâ€|it takes a strong will to go up against what you did, including Necron. And you, you poor boy. You've lived for so short a timeâ€|and yet, you've lived far more in that time than many do in decades. You've caught my interest, which is why I wanted to give you another chance at life. Not on Gaia, though. Yes, your friends are there. But with the Gaian cycle just getting back to normal, your friends will be dead and gone long ere you are reborn, and I cannot force it. Butâ€|there is another world where you can be reborn."

_Death then waved a hand, and an image appeared hovering above the table between them. An image of vast cities and strange vehicles. "Earth, a world where magic and the fantastic are hidden, and have been for centuries. It's still there. Just hidden." Then, a woman, gently held by a man as she wept, was shown. "The Hyoudou family. Twice they have tried to have a child. Twice, their hopes were cruelly torn by them through miscarriage. Unless someone intervenes, their third attempt will end in tragedy once more. Hence where you

come in. I can give you a second chance at life. I can give them the son they wanted. You won't remember your old life, not at first, but you will still have the ability to use the Black Magic of your world. After a certain point, when you're ready, the memories will come back. Just be aware, there are other souls on Earth who have come from Gaia. Do you accept?"

Vivi only hesitated briefly. As resigned as he had been to his death, to get the chance to start anew was nice. So he nodded. "Yes, please."

Death smiled. "As I said, what a polite boy you are!"

* * *

><p>Issei Hyoudou was a strange guy. He was a somewhat solemn, introverted boy, perhaps even a little nervous, though with a strange wellspring of courage within. And, had people but known it, a hidden impish streak. There seemed to be a strange mix of immaturity and maturity within him, as if he was both a child and an old man at the same time. He rarely smiled, but when it did, it lit up his light brown eyes. If only they knew the memories of a life he had once led on a world called Gaia, memories he had only regained a few years ago. They wouldn't believe him.</p>

He was a bit disturbed that he had a minor following soon after joining Kuoh Academy. Not as big as, say, Yuuto Kiba's. Then again, Kiba had very handsome European features and blonde hair, and had that effortlessly nice demeanour that Issei knew hid a lot of pain. But Issei, though not as handsome, had a small following.

He also had rivals. Loud, obnoxious rivals. Namely, the self-proclaimed Perverted Duo of Kuoh, loud and unrepentant perverts who tried to rope Issei into their peeping expeditions. Issei wanted none of it. It wasn't that, despite their loud accusations, he was gay. He was interested in girls. He just wasn't interested in being perverted, especially out in public.

In a way, the two reminded him a little of Zidane, given his endless flirting, especially with Garnet. But at least Zidane knew where to draw the line, a line Matsuda and Motohama merrily skipped over. Matsuda, he of the closely-cropped hair and lewd photography, and Motohama, who claimed his glasses could discern the measurements of a girl like a Scouter from *Dragonball Z* could discern ki levels. And they were cowards, too. And if there was one thing Zidane was not, it was a coward.

Issei wondered how Zidane was doing, whether he and Garnet had finally married and had kids. He wondered how his own cloned children were doing. Death had sent him a vision of Prince Puck of Burmecia being confronted by his clones in Alexandria, something that Issei thought hilarious. He wondered how Eiko was doing, now adopted by Cid Fabool IX and Lady Hilda Garde of Lundblum. Death had sent him a few memories of a year or so after he had died, but had given him no more. And in a way, he was glad. He didn't want to yearn any more for home than he already did.

It was during a lunch break that Issei passed by the Perverted Duo, looking lewdly at a peephole into the changing rooms of the Kendo Club. With an irritated sigh, Issei decided to use some Black Magic.

First, a small Fire spell to set Matsuda's pants on fire. Once the shaved-haired idiot yelped loud enough for the Kendo Club to hear, he used a Blizzard spell to freeze them in place. He did so without anyone noticing he used magic. He rarely used it on them, lest they think he was behind these odd occurrences. That, and he knew something few at Kuoh Academy did.

He wasn't the only one capable of using magic here. Though he was the only human here, as far as he knew, who could do so.

As the Kendo Club rushed by him, ready to wreak revenge on the Pervert Duo (they claimed that the occasional spell used to bring them to the Kendo Club's attention was some sort of divine intervention, and Issei wasn't going to disillusion them), Issei became aware that he was being watched. He looked up at a window of the old school building, a large Victorian house. There, looking out at him, was a buxom girl with beautiful blood-red hair framing a regal face, and blue-green eyes. Rias Gremory, another student with a big following for her beauty, her grace, and elegance. Apparently the head of the Occult Research Club.

He knew of the other members. Kiba was one of them. Another was Akeno Himejima, a dark-haired serene girl who was, if anything, even more buxom than Rias. And there was Koneko Toujou, the petite, cute girl with silvery-white hair, golden eyes, and a quiet, laconic demeanour.

He also knew something about them that he knew they wouldn't want getting out, something he had learned from his partner. For in this life, while he had his Black Magic with him, he also had something else: he had a dragon sealed into him. Although his real name was Ddraig, Vivi opted to give him the nickname of Steiner, after the Captain of Alexandria's Pluto Knights who believed in him even when he couldn't believe Zidane. Ddraig wasn't asblinkered, stubborn and simple as Steiner could be, but there was something about the dragon's voice and personality that reminded him of Steiner. Stalwart, loyal, and strong.

Steiner and Issei had spoken to each other for the first time shortly after Issei had regained his memories as Vivi. Since then, Issei began to train not just his magic, but his body, so that one day, he would be able to use the Sacred Gear Steiner dwelt within, the Boosted Gear. In fact, as part of that training, recently, he began hunting Stray Devils. It was through Steiner that Issei learned of the wars between the Angels, the Fallen, and the Devils. It was Steiner who alerted him to the presence of the same. And it was Steiner who alerted him to Stray Devils. They only killed a few, lest they bring too much attention on themselves.

Hard to believe that they're Devils, Issei thought when his eyes met those of Rias.

True, and the Gremory family are, for the most part, amongst the most altruistic of Devils, Steiner rumbled. **_You have aroused her interest, to be sure. She is no fool, she will have detected the magic you use. She's probably making plans to entice you into her Peerage_**.

I'd rather do that only as a last resort, Issei thought. _I'd rather help people as a normal humanâ€|well, as normal as I can get,

than as a Devil. At least she seems like one of the nicer ones..

The sounds of Matsuda and Motohama being beaten with _shinai_ and _bokken_ filled the air behind him. Issei sighed, before opting to head for the library. As he moved off, he was acutely aware of the eyes of Rias Gremory on him.

* * *

><p>After Issei moved out of view, Rias Gremory, Heir to the House of Gremory, returned to the chess game she was playing, her opponent, Queen, and very good friend Akeno standing beside her. "Akeno! I saw Issei using magic on the Perverted Duo again. Magic independent of a Sacred Gear! it seems that he is getting even more interesting. Especially with that Sacred Gear."</p>

"Should we arrange a meeting?" Akeno asked.

Rias shook her head. "Sona and I have received orders from our respective Satan siblings," she said. "Observe, but don't invite outright. Instead, give him one of the summoning leaflets, and hope that he does summon us. In any case, you can see it in his eyes. He seems to know what we are. He's wary, though he doesn't hate us. But given that he may be behind the Strays that have been killed through unusual magic, my brother has asked me to keep my distance, for my own safety. I'll try to make sure one of my familiars gets a leaflet to him. Oh, and checkmate."

As Rias got up, Akeno scrutinised the board. "Oh, and I thought that was a hard one."

"You could always try again," Rias said, as she began taking off her clothes, before walking to a curtained alcove. The club room they were in was panelled in dark wood, and looked like the living quarters of a mansion, so it was somewhat incongruous that, hidden by the curtains, was a shower. But Devils often had their quirks if they weren't malicious, and one of Rias' was her enjoyment of a good hot shower, even if it was near other people.

As she showered, the drops of hot water running down a body many a woman would kill to have, she thought of Issei Hyoudou. She wanted him in his Peerage, not just because she needed more servants in her Peerage, so that she had a better chance against Riser Phoenix. There was something in him, a melancholy, a lugubriousness, that made her want to reach out to him, even hug him. And, of course, there was the fact that Issei was a mystery. And she found herself intrigued by a new mysteryâ€|

CHAPTER 1 ANNOTATIONS:

So, here you have it, the first chapter of **_Black Mage of Kuoh_****. I decided not to have the first encounter with Yuuma/Raynare in this chapter, deciding to merely show Issei/Vivi and Rias. Having Issei already aware of his Sacred Gear and talking to Ddraig was something I had in mind long before this became a ****_Final Fantasy IX_**** crossover.**

I brought in Death as a character for my pure Harry Potter story **_In Spite of Obstinate Men_**** (admittedly as a bit of a ****_deus ex machina_****), and my Harry Potter/****_Final Fantasy

XII_**** crossover ****_Nitimir in Vetitum_****. There, Death took on the appearance of Lily Potter. Here, I decided she would appear as Garnet.**

While this story will go through the stations of canon of **_Highschool DxD_****, I intend for it to be something of a character piece. It will also be strictly Issei/Rias, rather than a harem. Canon Issei is very much a harem-seeker, but Vivi reincarnated as Issei wouldn't be.**

And yes, as Death had pretty much said, there will be other **_Final Fantasy IX_**** characters appearing in this story, reincarnated as characters from ****_Highschool DxD_****.**

No numbered annotations this time.

3. Chapter 2: Raynare and Rias

CHAPTER 2:

RAYNARE AND RIAS

It was on the way home from school that Issei was alerted by Steiner. **_Partner_**, the ancient dragon said. **_You've picked up a couple of tails. One's Koneko Toujou, the_**** nekomata ****_with Gremory's Peerage. The other is a Fallen. She's approaching you. Her intent is not immediately hostile, but she's up to something, I know it_**.

Issei nodded, before he heard, "You're Issei Hyoudou, aren't you?"

Issei turned, and found himself facing a demure girl about his age, with long dark hair. "I am. What's your name?"

"Yuuma Amano," the girl said, looking somewhat nervous. "Iâ€|I was just wonderingâ€|would you like to go out with me?"

Malicious she may be, but subtle she is not(**_1)_**, Steiner remarked with an amused tone.

"Umm, that's a bit sudden, isn't it?" Issei asked. "I mean, I don't know you." He then approached her, and said, quietly, "If you were that interested in me, Miss Fallen Angel, you just had to ask me outright."

Her eyes widened. "How did youâ€|? Iâ€|"

"Look, I don't care what you are, as long as you're a good person," Issei said. "If you want to meet for a talk, then we can do that."

The flustered Fallen seemed to regain her confidence, and said, "Oh, well, in that case, how about tomorrow afternoon, after school, just outside the school gates?"

"Sure. Not exactly a date, but just a little discussion, right?"

Yuuma nodded, almost too eagerly. "Okay, I'll see you tomorrow afternoon! Bye!" And with that, she scurried off. Issei watched her go, before he looked over to where, just concealed, was the petite form of Koneko, sucking on some lolly or other. She froze when she realised that he had seen her.

Issei approached her, with her looking impassively at him. Then, after a moment, he said, "I used to have eyes that colour. They're rather pretty, you know." And with that, and an impish smirk, he walked home, knowing he had just baffled Koneko with that little non-sequitur.

* * *

><p>"So, not only is that girl not human, but Issei seemed to know it?" Rias asked when Koneko returned to the Occult Research Club's rooms.</p>

Koneko nodded. "He is perceptive. That comment about my eyesâ€œ|I am not sure what to make of it."

"Neither am I," Rias said. "I guess that's just one more piece to add to the puzzle that is Issei Hyoudou. I'll have to have one of my familiars intercept him with one of our leaflets. I hate standing by while someone may try to harm him. Especially if she may be a Fallen. Word on the Underworld grapevine is that Azazel has told the Grigori to only observe Sacred Gear holders, but there's discontent amongst the ranks of the Fallen. They might try to kill him, or else steal his Sacred Gear. And there's the possibility that they may even recruit him to their side, and with his ability to use magic we don't know ofâ€œ|"

"Judging by how he acted, he seemed noncommittal. They only seemed to agree to meet later," Koneko said.

"Even soâ€œ|" Rias sighed, taking out a case filled with chess pieces, all of them red, and seeming to glow gently with an inner light. There was a Knight piece, a Bishop piece, a Rook piece, and eight Pawns. "This is a disturbing development," she murmured as she toyed pensively with the Bishop piece.

"We'll do what we can," Akeno said.

"Let's hope that it's enough," Rias murmured.

* * *

><p>Issei was acutely aware of the scrutiny of the Occult Research Club the next day. He wasn't surprised when, earlier that morning, on the way to school, a beautiful girl all but shoved a flier into his hands, a flier with an occult circle, and 'Make Your Wishes Come True' on it in gothic lettering. Steiner identified it as a summoning sigil, and for the Gremory family. Issei kept it just in case: if Yuuma tried to kill him, the summoning circle might be the only way to come back to life in a world where Phoenix Downs and Life magic didn't exist, as far as he knew.</p>

After school, he went and met Yuuma just outside the school gates. He heard the despairing cries of the Perverted Duo, lamenting the fact that Issei had apparently gotten himself a girlfriend. While Issei

didn't consider Yuuma a girlfriend by any means, he didn't disillusion the two idiots.

Yuuma did ask Issei if they could stop by the local arcade first, as well as grab a bite to eat. Issei acceded, even managing to win a scrunchy for the Fallen. She had put it onto her arm.

Issei then followed Yuuma to a local park, one with a rather large fountain. "You know," Yuuma said, wistfully, "I haven't really had fun like that for a while. But I guess it's time to get down to business."

Issei nodded, as the girl sat down on the rim of the fountain. "Why is one of the Fallen interested in me? Is it the Sacred Gear?"

Yuuma shrugged. "Yeah. Plus, we heard rumours that someone has been going after Stray Devils in the area, and a human at that. The odd thing is, there were traces of a magic we have never encountered before. And, well, if you can go after Stray Devils and come out intact!" With a sigh of what could have been regret, a lance of light formed in her hands. "Sorry, but you're a threat. No offence."

"Some taken," Issei replied, dodging to the side as she hurled the Light-Spear. Toxic to Devils, it was still damaging, even lethal, to a human as well.

Yuuma clicked her tongue in annoyance. A pair of raven-black wings sprouted from her back, her clothes dissolving, her (admittedly beautiful) body ageing by about a decade, so that she appeared to be in her late twenties. Clothing reformed itself around her body, becoming a rather revealing outfit like something out of a Boris Vallejo painting, all latex and leather straps, somewhere between a fantasy warrior and a BDSM outfit. Her face became even more beautiful, but in a dark and cruel way that reminded Vivi of Kuja's elegant features.

But Issei wasn't idle. Even as she transformed, he began gathering power for a spell. If she intended to kill him, he needed to go all out.

"You are but a child, playing around in a world you barely have any comprehension of," Yuuma said, standing, and making another Light-Spear. "But playtime is over. I'll make your end painless. Consider that a boon from me for dealing with those Stray Devils for us."

"I've met people like you before, Yuuma," Issei said, "if that's your real name. You think a cruelty is a kindness."

"A human, lecturing me?" Yuuma chuckled. "How amusing. Oh, and my real name is Raynare, FYI. Just thought you might like to know. Do you have any last words?"

"Yes: _Flare_."

Orange and red energy seemed to coalesce around Raynare, rushing inwards before suddenly exploding outwards, causing the Fallen to scream in pain and anger. Issei, meanwhile, ran for the trees, summoning the Boosted Gear. **_BOOST!_** Steiner's voice

roared.

"Oh, you little _shit!_" Raynare screamed, her voice now husky with pain and burning with rage. "I was going to make your end painless, but for that, I'm gonna exsanguinate you!" Issei heard the flap of wings behind him. Instinct screamed at him to dive behind a tree as a flurry of Light-Spears nearly turned him into a hedgehog. Issei peeked around the tree, to find Raynare, some of her hair singed off, and with patches of burns covering parts of her skin. Her clothes were burnt and tattered ruins that had gone beyond 'wardrobe malfunction'.

**_BOOST!_* Steiner roared.

As she flung more Light-Spears, Issei yelled, "_BLIZZAGA!_" A wall of ice sprang up between him and Raynare, and the Light-Spears stuck with an almost comical twang. As Raynare stared, Issei followed it up with a snarled, "_THUNDAGA!_"

Raynare blinked as her hair began standing on end, and electricity crackled around her. She realised what was coming a split-second before the bolt of lightning hit her with a tremendous explosion. When the light faded, Raynare was staggering around, smoke wafting from her body. "Did someone get the number of that truck?" she murmured deliriously, before collapsing.

**_BOOST!_* Steiner roared again, before he yelled in a panicked tone, **_PARTNER, WATCH OUT!_*

But it was too late.

Suddenly, Issei felt burning pain run through his body, leaving a frosty numbness in its wake. "You put up a good showing, boy," a man's voice said quietly. "I haven't seen a human, even one with a Sacred Gear, do what you did to Raynare. Sadly, that means you're an even bigger threat to us than we thought." He was lowered to the ground almost tenderly, finding himself looking into the aquiline features of a middle-aged man wearing a fedora and a trenchcoat, dark wings sprouted from his back. There was a curious mixture of anger, contempt, and even some respect.

Issei looked up at him, and rasped, "I just want to live a good life. I wanted to help people."

"Well, you've killed a few Stray Devils. That's a good enough achievement for a human. But it's time for you to die. Feel honoured that it was Dohnaseek who did the deed," the man said, doffing his fedora in a half-sincere gesture of respect, before he went over to help Raynare.

Issei struggled to his hands and knees, and gathered enough energy for one last parting shot. "_Bio_," he whispered. Dohnaseek and Raynare (the former having helped the latter to her feet) was briefly enveloped in a green, gelatinous blob.

Dohnaseek turned to face Issei. "Was that meant to hurt?"

Issei merely gave a pained grin. He knew Dohnaseek and Raynare had been poisoned. He just hoped he made them regret killing him. It wouldn't kill them, but they would remember him. As they flew into

the sky on a flap of their wings (well, Dohnaseek's more than Raynare's, as hers were badly singed by the Flare spell), Issei felt the life draining from him. He cursed himself for not being able to learn White Magic. After remembering where he came from, he tried to learn, only to realise that he was incapable. Maybe his soul, that of a Black Mage Golem, was simply incapable of using curative magic. And because there were no Potions or Phoenix Downsâ€!

Partner, use the summoning sigil, Steiner's voice urged.
You're dying, she'll be able to save you*.

Issei grunted in pain, fishing around in his pocket, and finding it. "Pleaseâ€|" he hissed, holding it. "Helpâ€|meâ€|" He then sagged back down to the ground again.

Crimson light filled his sight, and the last thing he saw before darkness finally claimed him was the form of Rias Gremory emerging from a magic circle made of sanguine lightâ€|

* * *

><p>It was at the cemetery at the Black Mage Village, when Vivi first came here, along with Zidane, Garnet, and Quina. It was the night they stayed there. Vivi, disquieted by Number 288's words, had come back here, looking at the graves. Not many, but they were there.

As he crouched down to look at one gravestone, he heard the resonant voice of 288. "Good evening. It's good to see you again, Vivi."

Vivi nearly leapt out of his skin, and whirled to face the leader of the Black Mage Village, looking pensive. Eventually, he said, "Iâ€|I wanted to ask you something. I didn't know whether I should in front of the others. I wanted to knowâ€|how many of usâ€|stopped moving."

After a moment, 288 came over and put a kindly hand on Vivi's shoulder. "Viviâ€|you are kind to use our words. But you and Iâ€|we know the reality of what we speak. We don't need euphemisms. You already know of what it means to liveâ€|and to be mortal. You're speaking of dying, not 'stopping'." After a moment, he said, "Seven of us died recently. Our lifespan is limited, something I have suspected since the first of us perished. It varies, but after a year of life, we simply cease to function."

_ "Noâ€|" Vivi hissed in dismay. Was this the case with him? He felt a cold chill of fear run down his spine._

_ "As you may understand, I haven't told anyone else," 288 said quietly. "Because if I didâ€|I know they would feel the same way I do."_

_ "â€|And what is that?"_

_ "Perhaps fear," 288 said with a shrug. "I don't want to die. I don't want to stop. Perhaps I even want to run, run away, perhaps even run so far and fast, even the Reaper cannot find me. Butâ€|living here with everyone, it fills me with joy, a joy that outweighs my fear of death. Perhaps it's the same with you and those others, Zidane,

Dagger, and Quina. It helps give your life meaning, purpose, and joy." -

_Vivi wondered, was that truly the case? But then, he realised, he knew the answer all along! -

* * *

><p>Issei woke slowly from his slumber, at least at first, even with the alarm clock blaring. It was only when the memories of the prior evening caught up with him that he all but leapt out of bed. He examined himself, and realised two things that were anomalous. The first was that he had no hole in his stomach from the Light-Spear. The second was that he was stark naked, and he usually didn't sleep that way.</p>

Steiner's chuckles echoed in his mind. **_Partner, turn around. You had a bedmate and you didn't even notice_***.

Issei did so, and it was all he could do not to scream in surprise and fright. Rias Gremory was in his bed. And, like him, she was completely naked. He was torn between staring at her beautiful body, and rushing around in panic like a freshly-beheaded chicken. As it was, it was rendered moot when Rias woke, sitting up, stretching, and yawning, the action doing interesting things to her large breasts. And Issei became acutely aware that he had a very conspicuous erection. He quickly fumbled for some boxers and pulled them on swiftly. It wouldn't conceal the fact that he had an erection, but it would at least conceal the uncooperative organ doing so. Which was better than nothing.

Rias giggled when she saw his actions. "Good morning, Issei," she said, as if this was utterly normal for her.

"Ummâ€|morning. You do know you're naked, right?" Issei asked.

"Of course," Rias said with a sultry smile.

And then, it got worse. "Issei, are you awake?" his mother called.

Shit! Issei thought. "Cover yourself!" he hissed at her. As she did so, apparently with reluctance, he tapped his stomach. "Did you heal this?"

She nodded. "Issei?" his mother called. "You must have come back late last night. That isn't like you, so I want anâ€|" When his mother opened the door, and found her son half-naked, and Rias naked, underneath bedsheets, she said, "Explanation?" in a small, bemused voice.

After a moment, Issei said, "Mum, this is Rias Gremory. She's like me, a mage. I got mugged last night, and the guy stabbed me in the guts. Rias brought me back and healed me."

Rias was startled that he would say such a thing to his mother, who merely blinked, and then asked, "Then why are you naked, Miss Gremory?"

"Call me Rias, please, and my form of healing magic requires skin

contact, the more the better. Don't worry, we're still virgins," Rias said, going with it. "I haven't done anything inappropriate with your son."

"Oh," Mrs Hyoudou said, torn between bemusement and trying to discern whether Rias was telling a lie. Eventually, she said, "You had better hurry, or you'll be late for school." Then, she hurriedly left.

Rias blinked, before saying, "She took that well. She knows you can use magic?"

"For a few years now," Issei said. Rias emerged from the bedsheets, and began pulling on her clothing. "Is that true, that whole thing about skin contact?"

Rias nodded as she pulled on her panties. "Of course, I also like to sleep naked, but skin contact is needed for my form of healing, and the more the better. You seem remarkably unfazed about this. You seemed more shocked by my being in bed with you, naked, than being brought back to life. I was telling a bit of a lie, though. I didn't heal the wound while you slept. I decided, given how much you fought back against the Fallen from all the damage to the area, I should make sure you were fine, and they didn't track you down for any reprisals." She had, by this point, slipped her bra on, and asked, "Could you help me fasten this?"

"Umm, okay," Issei said. As he did so, he said, "Soâ€œ|I guess you used an Evil Piece to revive me?"

Rias stiffened, before saying, "You're well-informed. So, you know what I am?"

"A Devil, and the Heir to the House of Gremory," Issei said. It was just as well he had finished fumbling with the bra clasp, and had done it up, for she whirled to face him, her eyes wide with surprise. And, with an impish notion entering his head, he smiled. "Nice to meet you."

She soon returned that smile, and shook his proffered hand. "Nice to meet you too, Issei Hyoudou." And Issei got the feeling that things were, if not going to be all right, then weren't going to be so bad after allâ€œ|

CHAPTER 2 ANNOTATIONS:

So, Issei had to fight off Raynare and Dohnaseek. The reason why he did so well against Raynare was because he caught her by surprise, and she isn't familiar with the magic of the **_Final Fantasy_**** universe.**

I hope you guys liked the scene, taken more or less from the game, but with a few modifications, between Vivi and 288.

Now, I've decided on who will be reincarnated **_Final Fantasy IX_**** characters. Kiba and Akeno definitely will be, along with Ravel and Freed. I'm still yet to decide on whether Asia is a reincarnation or not. In addition, I've definitely decided who Kiba, Akeno, and Freed will be, and jgkitarel had an interesting idea for who Ravel may be. Who they turn out to be will surprise you. I'm trying to figure out a character to be Kuja's reincarnation, though,

so it may be some time before he comes into the story.**

Review-answering time! I'm surprised this story got reviews so swiftly. I've already answered **jgkitarel****'s question in correspondence. So, I'll answer ****Exiled Soul Nomad**** instead: See above for what happens to Issei. He basically got ganked by Dohnaseek. And keep in mind that, physical strength wise, Issei is actually stronger than Vivi, partly due to encouragement from Ddraig (or Steiner, as Issei calls him), though his magical ability is a little less than when he was Vivi.**

Mangahero18**: I did see amongst the favourites of one of my readers a crossover between ****_Final Fantasy IX_**** and ****_RWBY_****, where Vivi ends up in the ****_RWBY_**** universe for some reason.**

Guest**: Sadly, I did have him dying on the date, but I hope the above fight felt better than the norm. As noted above, if Dohnaseek wasn't there, Issei would have either defeated Raynare, or else escaped successfully. Sadly, Raynare and Dohnaseek thought that having the pair of them there would ensure they succeeded. And you got how I'm looking to do the relationship with Asia right. Unlike in canon, Issei and Asia will have a big brother-little sister relationship. Issei will be more focused on Rias as a love interest.**

1. This is a reworking of Einstein's famous quote, "The Lord is subtle, but malicious he is not".

4. Chapter 3: The Peerage

CHAPTER 3:

THE PEERAGE

On the way to Kuoh Academy, Rias said she would keep her questions to herself until after school, where she was convening a meeting of the Occult Research Club. Issei, given that he was now part of her Peerage, had to attend, as part of an orientation. She also warned Issei that Raynare had erased herself, or at least her alter-ego of Yuuma, from anyone who might know. Including the Perverted Duo.

Unfortunately, even if they had forgotten Yuuma, they had witnessed Rias walking with Issei, and promptly began harassing him. Rias had agreed to back him up with his cover story: that she had helped save him from a mugger, and had stayed overnight to make sure he was all right. She went along with it because it boosted her reputation in the school, though Rias and Issei agreed not to mention the whole 'naked in bed together' thing.

Breakfast had been an odd affair, with Rias puzzled that the Hyoudous had been so accepting of the fact she had magic. However, it made things easier, and it meant that she didn't need to erase any part of their memories, to Issei's relief. She did warn the Hyoudous that, given the Occult Research Club's activities, Issei may be late coming home, something Issei's parents were supportive of, as long as Issei wouldn't have any more run-ins with muggers.

All too soon, the day was over, and Issei was escorted by Yuuto Kiba (the 'enemy of all men everywhere', as the Perverted Duo put it, due to his wonderfully handsome looks) to the Occult Research Club. As he walked into the clubroom, he saw Koneko sitting on a lounge, eating sweets. She saw him come in, and peered at him in an appraising manner, angling her plate away slightly, as if afraid he would take some of her sweets. He liked sweets, true, but he had no intention of pilfering any of hers.

His attention was drawn to the curtained-off area of the room, from which he was sure he could hear running water. "Uhh, does she have a shower in there?" he asked Kiba.

"Yes," Kiba said with a smile. Not a lecherous one, but rather, the kindly smile of someone trying to be helpful, as well as having a bit of a giggle at someone else's expense.

Issei blinked, before he said, "Is she an exhibitionist or something?"

"Possibly," Koneko said with a shrug. The running water turned off at that time.

Issei decided to sit down next to the petite girl. "Well, I guess I'll have to wait, won't I? It just seems like an odd place to have one. Plumbing alone must've been expensive in an old house like this."

"For your information, Issei," Rias said from behind the curtain, "there are wonderful things you can do with magic, a little forethought, and plumbing supplies. Given that you know magic, I'm surprised that you haven't thought of that."

"My magic is what you use to kill enemies," Issei said. "By setting them on fire, electrocuting them, freezing them, poisoning them, that sort of thing. It's not always useful in household settings."

"Huh." After a little while longer, Rias, dressed, emerged from the curtained-off shower, followed by Akeno. "Well, normally, I would welcome you to our Occult Research Club, and to my Peerage, but you seem to know more than I thought any human would. So, tell me what you know, and if there's any gaps in your knowledge or misconceptions, I'll clear them up."

Issei nodded. "Well, I have some insider information. I know everyone in this room is a Devil, and with the exception of you, Rias, we're 'Reincarnated' Devils, Devils who were once a different type of being. Kiba and I are the only former humans, too. I know Koneko is a nekomata, and Akeno is a Nephilim. Half-human, half-Fallen Angel. And before you fret, Akeno, I don't care that you are half-Fallen. I wanted to give Raynare the benefit of the doubt."

"Ohâ€|thank you," Akeno said, her usually serene expression a crash site of shock and relief and even a little annoyance.

"I am sorry for bringing up painful memories, but Rias told me to say what I knew. I didn't know you didn't like being a Nephilim." Issei tapped his lips in thought. "Anyway, I know Devils use the Evil Pieces, enchanted chess sets that can change non-Devils into Devils.

Those recruited in such a manner by a High-Class Devil are called that Devil's Peerage. The Peerage are the servants and entourage of the High-Class Devil. The reason why the Evil Pieces exist is because of a catastrophic series of wars between Heaven and the Underworld, and the Three Factions, the Angels, the Devils, and the Fallen. Basically, you're in what is a standoff rather than a full peace. Devils gain their power by fulfilling the wishes of humans, usually in exchange for items of material value rather than the classical selling of a soul. And you're not the only Devil from a noble family in Kuoh: Sona Sitri is too. And finally, I'd be willing to bet that the Evil Pieces you revived me with were either Pawns, or a Bishop."

Rias gaped at him, shocked at the knowledge he had just displayed, before nodding mutely. She wasn't used to being dumbfounded, he could tell. "I took a gamble and used my remaining Bishop on you. Butâ€|how did you know about all of this?"

Issei had an impish grin on his face, before holding up his hand. "Well, I can take a guess as to why you are interested in me." He summoned his Boosted Gear, a red gauntlet that almost resembled something reptilian that covered his forearm.

"So, you know about Sacred Gears," Rias said. "But how does that have anything to do with you knowing these things? That looks like a Twice Critical, and they're fairly common."

Issei's grin widened. "Actually, it's the Boosted Gear, the Sacred Gear with the Red Dragon Emperor Ddraig sealed within. He's been my tutor about your world."

Rias and her Peerage gaped stupidly at that revelation. Even the usually-impassive Koneko seemed shocked. "Boosted Gear?!" Rias hissed. "But that's one of the Longinuses!" Then, the surprise became replaced by a thoughtful expression. "I see. That's how. Ddraig is one of the Heavenly Dragons, and he was involved in our conflicts as part of Boosted Gear. Though it is unusual that you've awakened him so early."

"Let's just say that I'm unusual anyway," Issei said.

"Yes. It's a rare human who can use magic without a Sacred Gear, or help from one of the Three Factions," Rias said. "Did you learn it, or was it innate?"

"Both. You probably wouldn't believe me if I told you where I learned it," Issei said.

"Oh my," Akeno said, having recovered her composure from Issei knowing her heritage, and having returned to smiling serenely. "Any other tricks you have up your sleeve?"

"Wellâ€|"

* * *

><p>As he fought the Stray Devil, something that looked like the mutant offspring of a Nymph and a Malboro (cute, if green body, but the head was all mouth and fangs and eyes), he glared at the mangled bodies all around. All these innocent people, this creature consumed.

"Why?!" he demanded. "What did they do to deserve that?!"

_ "They're lower than I," the Stray Devil hissed. "Humans exist only as food for us! Now, sit still and __**die!**__"-

As the creature lunged, Issei flashed back to the time he was Vivi. He remembered watching as Black Waltz Number 3 used Thundara spells to wipe out the Black Mages who confronted him, in seeming defence of Vivi. The Thundara spell tore through the cargo ship, sending the barrels containing the inactive Black Mages within plummeting to their doom before they could even live.

Soon, Vivi was the only Black Mage left alive on the ship, save for the Black Waltz, who laughed sneeringly. Even the comforting hands of Garnet on his shoulders didn't stop the upwelling of sheer rage he felt. With a scream of fury, he rushed out of the wheelhouse of the cargo ship, feeling the light of Trance surround him, his clothes transforming, sending spells at the Black Waltz even as the original Steiner and Zidane joined him.

_That's what he felt right now. Righteous anger. And he felt the familiar surge of energy coming with the rage. Had he seen himself, Issei would have been astonished to see him change into a grown-up form of Vivi's Trance form, a shining, iridescent version of the Black Mage outfit, with two yellow eyes peering out from an eldritch darkness between pointed hat and coat. Not peering out, actually, as much as __**glaring**__ out._

_ "__**Burn**__," Issei snarled, before sending Firaga spells at the Stray Devil, reducing it to ashesâ€|_

* * *

><p>"A few," Issei said. "The problem was, I was so concentrating on stopping Raynare, I didn't think there'd be a second one. Plus, I'm a bit more used to fighting alongside others. That's why they gave me trouble."<p>

"I think they may have used a dampening field of some kind," Rias mused. "There was evidence that they set one up. It might have hindered your full ability. Or maybe it was a field designed to prevent your escape. Well, in any case, your knowledge is fairly comprehensive, but it does still have some gaps. Anyway, let me now say, welcome to my Peerage, Issei. I am the King of the Peerage, as you've doubtless deduced. Akeno is my Queen. Kiba is my sole Knight, and Koneko is my sole Rook. You are actually my second Bishop, but my first Bishop is not available to me for a number of reasons."

"Why not?" Issei asked.

"His powers are too great for him to control, and he has considerable psychological issues. My brother asked that he be sealed away. You are aware that my brother is Sirzechs Lucifer, one of the Four Great Satans?"

Issei blinked, before saying, "Uh, no. Steinerâ€|that's my nickname for Ddraig, by the way, he told me of their existence, but not that you were related to him."

Steiner remarked, **Well, I don't have to tell you everything. Besides, if you knew earlier, you'd be a lot more nervous. You were ever since I told you she was the heir to her family. By the way, Sona Sitri's sister is also one of the Great Satans: Serafall Leviathan**.

"Issei? You tuned out for a moment there," Kiba asked, waving a hand in front of his eyes.

"Sorry, Steiner was speaking," Issei said. "He just told me Sona Sitri's sister is another of the Great Satans, Serafall Leviathan."

"Yes. You wouldn't know it to meet either of them," Rias said. "My brother's fairly laid back, and Serafall is nuts for magical girl anime and things like that. But they're also the most powerful Devils in the Underworld, which is how they got their positions. Devils respect power and strength above so many other qualities. Anyway, as I was saying, my first Bishop, Gasper Vladi, is sealed away. Don't worry, he's fine with it. He's a hikikomori, a shut-in."

"Okay, so, as part of your Peerage, what am I expected to do? I sort of got the gist from Steiner, but I'd like to hear what you want," Issei said. "I'm not sure I like being a servant, but I have no choice, do I?"

"No. And I'm sorry," Rias said. "But don't worry, I don't expect you to wait hand and foot on me. How Devils treat their Peerages varies from Devil to Devil. Some treat them as a collection of slaves. At least one I know of makes his Peerage his own personal harem." Issei didn't fail to notice the disgust and contempt in her voice when she spoke of this Devil, and wondered who it was. "I'd like to think that I treat my Peerage as my friends and family. I'll be frank with you, Issei, all of my Peerage so far have had trying lives. I would like to think that being part of my Peerage was preferable to what they had."

Issei looked at them. He could tell, actually. He did note that Kiba's expression was of someone hiding pain. And Akeno had been surprised and hurt by his saying she was a Nephilim, suggesting she detested her Fallen heritage. What pain did Koneko hide? And for that matter, now that he came to think about it, what pain did Rias hide?

Unbidden, an image of Princess Garnet came to mind, as she was when she had just come back to Alexandria after her mother's death, the weight of responsibility crushing down upon her. Rias, despite her confident smile, had a similar look. It was all in those beautiful blue-green eyes of hers. Sadness, resignation, and the look of someone under pressure due to their station. There was something of Freya's pain as well, he realised. Both Freya and Garnet had felt frustrated at the lack of control over their lives, albeit for different reasons.

"Anyway, your duties are to help fulfil the contracts between Devils and humans, as well as generally help around with our club activities. We will be called upon, from time to time, to deal with Stray Devils, though you have some experience in that area. Finally, when it comes time to fight in Rating Games, you will be fighting alongside me," Rias concluded.

Issei nodded. He wasn't happy about being a servant, but between that and death, well, if he was still alive, he could still help people, even if he was a Devil. And Rias seemed nice enough. "Okay. Soâ€|what's next on the agenda?"

Rias smiled, clearly happy that all the expositional preamble was out of the way. "Well, let's see what we need to coverâ€|"

* * *

><p>The sound of laughter filled the derelict church, a cracked, braying thing that was more hyena than hilarity. The subjects of the hilarity, Raynare and Dohnaseek, looked less than impressed by the man laughing. Neither did their companions, both female, and both Fallen. One was dressed in that Victorian-like style known as Gothic Lolita, appearing to be in her teens, and with a petulant and childish demeanour. The other was an older woman, but dressed in a minidress, and looking more sultry than her comrade. The former was Mittelt, and the latter was Kalawarner.</p>

"Freed, it isn't funny at all," Raynare growled, wincing underneath bandages that covered more of her body than her skimpy clothes in her Fallen form did, her body still healing from the poison and Issei's spells. "That bloody poison only just leached out of our systems. I feel like I've got the worst fucking hangover thanks to that poison, and I feel like taking it out on someone. Stop laughing, or I will take it out on you."

Freed didn't stop, though the volume and frequency of his hilarity did die down a little. He was in his late teens, a silver-haired boy who could have been handsome, had it not been for the frequent deranged looks that settled on his face. "I'm sorryâ€|ha haâ€|but a Fallen, given so much troubleâ€|pfftâ€|by a single guy with a Sacred Gear?" He laughed again.

Dohnaseek scowled, and swatted Freed on the back of the head. "Cease your insolence, Freed. You arrived only a few hours ago, and already you are irritating us. We need you to distract the local Peerages while we prepare to bring Asia Argento into the fold, and perhaps even extract her Sacred Gear. We've also received intelligence that Issei Hyoudou has been revived as part of Rias Gremory's Peerage."

Freed shook his head, before smirking. "Oh, but I know something you don't know," he said in a sing-song voice. "Those spells you described that guy Issei usingâ€|oh, it's so nostalgic. Oh, but to think another from that place has come to be reborn!" He danced about as if smitten by love, though the only thing Freed Sallzen, a rogue Exorcist excommunicated by the Church, loved was carnage and killing, using his profession as an excuse to indulge in murder. "Oh, I hope it is that Black Mage brat Vivi! Oh, how I remember the sting of his fire on me! Oh, the nostalgia, it's overwhelming!"

Raynare and her fellow Fallen shared a look. They weren't sure what he was talking about. His sanity was always in question, but this was another matter entirely. "So, what do you intend to do about him?"

Freed grinned viciously. "Oh, I have so many things in mind." He

stroked a pistol with disturbing affection. "Oh, he will die. Eventually. But not before I have my way with him. But I will ensure he dies, for good, this time. After all!" Electricity crackled around his form, and his eyes seemed to glow red briefly, before he hissed in a low growl, "_I exist only to kill_"

CHAPTER 3 ANNOTATIONS:

I'm surprised I got this next chapter out so quickly. Mostly exposition, and Issei wrongfooting Rias. I hope you liked the scene where Issei goes into Trance for the first time, though, complete with flashback (within a flashback!) of the scene where Vivi confronts Black Waltz Number 3. And I hope you like the intriguing hint about who Freed is. I'm sure fans of the game will know who Freed is the reincarnation of.

It may be a while before the next chapter comes out, lest I burn myself out.

Review-answering time! To those of you who complained about me railroading the fight in the last chapter, I'm not impressed by your complaints. I need to go through some stations of the canon. And please keep in mind that I am the writer of this work, not you guys. I am doing this on my own cognisance. In addition, I will reiterate here that part of the reason that Issei lost was that he got surprised by Dohnaseek. If Raynare had been alone, Issei may have won. I also wrote in that thing about the suppression field as a possible reason for you. In addition, Vivi **never**** fought alone in ****_Final Fantasy IX_****, save for offscreen (like in the Festival of the Hunt). He always fought with Zidane, Garnet, Steiner, etc by his side. There ****_will_**** be changes to the core ****_Highschool DxD_**** story: I intend for the storyline around Asia to be resolved differently. As in my Harry Potter/****_Highschool DxD_**** crossover ****_Fall to Zenith_****, she will come out of the experience with her humanity intact, and become a little sister figure to Issei and Rias. In the end, ****_I_**** am the author, and it is ****_I_**** who dictate how this story works out. I write this in my own time, on my own terms.**

Reishin Amara**: I have no idea which of the Fallen will survive, if any. Given how Vivi empathised with some of their enemies (like Queen Brahne at the end of Disc 2), it might be possible. As for Issei getting Black Mage clothes, well, he does in Trance, as shown above.**

jgkitarel**: Thank you. I was trying for that. They are aware that Issei is a danger, more than in canon. And yes, they felt the effects of Bio for a whole day. They can heal themselves to a degree, but it wasn't fun, and they're both somewhat annoyed.**

Kruggov**: True, but Doomsday also hurts the caster, and Issei didn't have any means of counteracting that. In a later chapter, though, we'll look at that. And the Hyoudous are very open-minded. In the light novels, apparently they learn of Issei's nature, and are accepting of it. Issei may also use other Black Magic spells. Although Ultima is only used by Kuja in the game, I see no reason for Issei not to use itâ€|albeit without destroying everything in sightâ€|**

****ninfan***:** It's a good idea, and I may consider it. I'm still deciding whether to have Kuja as Vali, or else as an OC Devil replacing Riser.**

****No numbered annotations this time.****

End
file.